

Military Base Closures-Opportunities for Law Enforcement?

By

Albert A. Pardini

San Francisco Police Department

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training

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In today's real estate market, who wouldn't like a chance to obtain some free land? Land with existing buildings and infrastructure; with roads, utilities and access to adjoining neighborhoods already stocked with retail stores and conveniences to serve the resident population? Well, your local military installation might just provide an answer to the growth challenges of your community. It might even give you a chance to think out of the box and create programs and services thought impossible without this kind of opportunity.

BRAC

The United States military is involved in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program, an effort to consolidate military bases and dispose of the unneeded property across the nation. Many times, the military conveys the former bases to interested local governments. If no government entities have an interest, the land may be sold to qualified private parties. This program has provided many opportunities for local governments that would not have been possible because of the high cost of acquiring land through traditional means. In many instances, local governments have taken possession of former bases and redeveloped the land into affordable housing. BRAC may also provide the foundation for some "out of the box" thinking when law enforcement agencies plan for the future.

Imagine any of these scenarios as being possible:

- Having the ability to build a law enforcement and community services facility that went beyond serving just the public safety needs.

- Creating a social service center as part of the community services facility that could address the needs of crime victims or people that come in contact with law enforcement.
- Being able to consolidate your public safety training facility into one complex. You eliminate many redundancies (gymnasiums, training exercise areas, and locker/shower room facilities, and cost saving could allow you to add a gymnasium or specialized training rooms dedicated to specific needs.
- Relocating your public safety facilities into a combined public safety complex that can house a police and fire agency. Once again, many redundancies are eliminated with the administrative offices consolidated, the opportunity to share support staff can reduce personnel costs and allow the savings to be directed to other needs.

These, and other, ideas can move from a pipedream to reality as opportunities arise to capitalize on land and facilities becoming available in many communities across the state. To see success, however, it is first necessary to understand the process of taking that first step. Let's review the process of acquiring former military bases.

Acquiring BRAC Properties

It is important to understand the reasons for base consolidations and the steps required by the military for local governments interested in receiving the unneeded properties. The base deployment and infrastructure of the military was originally designed with a focus on Cold War threats.¹ Bases were later transformed to capabilities focused on addressing more global threats, including the current War on Terror.² The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission was established in 1988, and is an independent entity made up of former leaders of the military and government officials. The Commission members are appointed by the President and operate under the authority granted to them by Congressional Act P.L. 101-510. This act was the result of an effort that began in the 1980's by the Business Executives for National Security (BENS) whose goal is to work with the government to use their business experience and expertise to develop realistic, practical solutions to address issues of national security and develop new methods to restructure the military for the 21st century.

As a result, the BRAC has engaged the White House, Congress and the Pentagon in an ongoing project to realign the military's infrastructure and land use. This involves the closure and realignment of military bases pursuant to the recommendations of the BRAC Commission. The purpose is to make our fighting forces as efficient, agile and give them

¹ Why Close Military Bases?. Business Executives for National Security.
http://www.bens.org/what_BRAC_WHY.html. 09/21/2005

² Why Close Military Bases?. Business Executives for National Security.
http://www.bens.org/what_BRAC_WHY.html. 09/21/2005

the ability to act as quickly as possible. Part of the task, however, involves keeping the military's support structure balanced to meet the needs of the fighting forces.

It is estimated that the Pentagon has an excess of 24 percent more bases beyond what it needs to accommodate its forces.³ This includes space to station military forces returning from overseas bases. The excess infrastructure that in this case is underused or closed military bases requires costly maintenance and security that diverts resources from higher-value military real property assets.

The Department of Defense (DOD) has estimated that by 2011, BRAC closings and realignments would save nearly \$12 billion per year. The money saved by these base closures can be used to modernize existing bases that have been identified as vital and may have received additional personnel as a result of a consolidation. The money would also be used to clean up the obsolete bases waiting to be conveyed to local governments or sold to private parties.

The BRAC process will be used to transition the property out of military control and eliminate the annual cost of operating an unneeded base. Another benefit of the program is the clean-up of antiquated, underused or contaminated properties and the removal of hazardous materials to prepare the property for redevelopment.

³ Why Close Military Bases?. Business Executives for National Security.
http://www.bens.org/what_BRAC_Why.html. 09/21/2005

Although consolidation makes former military base available, it also causes considerable anxiety in communities affected by the closure of a long-standing local revenue resource. Military bases typically create jobs for civilians, both on and off base, and numerous retail and commercial establishments rely heavily on the presence of military personnel as their customers. The prospect of losing jobs as a result of a base closure may taint the allure of the opportunity to acquire some surplus land, and has caused some communities to rally against some of the closures on many occasions.⁴ The needs of the military, and not the dependency of the surrounding community, would determine if the base would remain open. It is important for administrators planning to reutilize surplus BRAC property to work with the concerned to help them see the acquisition is not related to any closure. This is also an opportunity to build relationships as others see local government enhancing or rebuilding infrastructure to replace the loss of the military presence.

The goal of the federal government was to encourage communities to look at these base closures as an opportunity to create a plan for redevelopment of the property. The guidelines included a rapid transition of the land and the creation of a redevelopment agency to plan on the future use of the property.⁵ If a community could demonstrate a viable use for the property, the federal government will provide funding to clean up the property and remove toxic or hazardous waste. After the property is deemed “clean”, the

⁴ Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service, Brac Communities Regained 90 Percent of Lost Jobs Official Says. June 8, 2005. DefenseLink.Mil/News/Jun2005/20050608_1643.html

⁵ Base Reuse Implementation Manual, 12/1/1997. Revised as Base Redevelopment & Realignment Manual, 3/1/2006. Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (installations & Environment). [Http://DefenseLink.Mil/Brac/pdf/4165-66-<_BRRM.pdf](http://DefenseLink.Mil/Brac/pdf/4165-66-<_BRRM.pdf)

federal government will convey the property to the local government at no cost including any equipment that the military deemed unnecessary for use at other bases. Additionally, after some of the bases were transferred and redeveloped, the BRAC was able to document that ninety percent of the jobs that were lost were recovered as part of the redevelopment of the property.⁶

Local uses of BRAC Properties

One of the most common redevelopment plans that local governments have followed is to have affordable housing build to provide opportunities for low-income families and first-time buyers to purchase a home. Several cities in California have taken possession of former military bases and redeveloped the land into affordable housing and retail space. Redevelopment has occurred in Vallejo at the former Mare Island shipyard and has produced 1,400 new homes and over 7 million square feet of commercial and industrial space.⁷ Construction is in progress in San Francisco at the former naval shipyard at Hunters Point. At completion, the old military facilities will be transformed into 1,600 new homes (one-third are slated for affordable housing), 300,000 square feet of commercial space, 34 acres of open space and six acres of community facilities.⁸

⁶ Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service, BRAC Communities Regained 90 Percent Of Lost Jobs, Official Says. June 8, 2005. DefenseLink.mil.news/Jun2005/20050608_1643.html

⁷ Online, www.discovermareisland.com/general.html, 06/19/2006

⁸ James Temple, San Francisco Business Times, 03/31/2004, Online 06/19/2006

The opportunities, however, don't have to be limited to affordable housing, offering these former military properties to local government for redevelopment is also an ideal opportunity for law enforcement. Agencies can use the property for training, operations and administrative locations. With dwindling budgets and the high cost of real estate, the opportunities for acquisition of land, structures and equipment for use by law enforcement agencies, limited current budget constraints, may be a windfall.

Although law enforcement facilities are needed, they are often on the low end of local government's priority list, and are dependent on having an annual capital improvement request funded to move forward with necessary change. In the case of the San Francisco Police Department, it took a bond measure in 1987 to finance a major project that involved upgrading or completely rebuilding existing police stations and the shooting range. If the police department was able to use BRAC land at the time bonding was considered, the costs would have been much lower and facilities completed several years earlier.

An immediate benefit when a base is conveyed to a local government is property the typically has many of the original buildings that will need to be demolished as part of the redevelopment process. The fact that these buildings are expendable provides an excellent opportunity for training. These opportunities include academy training and in-service training for patrol officers, high-risk SWAT and E.O.D members. In the final days before the demolition is going to occur, the SWAT and E.O.D. members will have the rare training opportunity that allows for the destruction of the existing buildings. The

opportunity can then be passed on to the fire department that can conduct training that involves burning the structures. The real experience would not be possible if the agency had not come into control of the land and structures.

The ultimate opportunity for the police is that the property will provide a location to replace an aging law enforcement facility, build a new facility or build a leading-edge regional police training site. Planners would be remiss, however, if they did not move beyond conventional needs and used some “out of the box” thinking to take the opportunity in a different direction. What if a local government used the opportunity to build a facility that houses law enforcement and other social services in a “one-stop shop” locale?

Typically, BRAC land would be developed into residential or commercial uses generating an annual tax base for the community that is greater than the minor cost of increasing public safety services to the area. As part of the redevelopment plan, the developer often incurs the cost of building a police or fire station to serve the community and the only cost incurred by the city is the cost of operating the facility including personnel costs. A community with vision should analyze the importance of providing comprehensive public safety and social service infrastructure and a collaborative approach to assisting the crime victim. This would be the perfect place to use examples of successful programs as examples of what could be done. With this information, they could plan a single facility that would operate independently to serve citizens from a variety of walks of life.

The benefits of this development would be that the “key” service providers would be at one location, offering interrelated services. The buildings would not have common hallways thus allowing for customer confidentiality at each agency, citizens or staff could simply exit one facility and walk next door to receive services. Other “out of the box” opportunities include, but are not limited to, developing a joint training facility. Consolidating facilities would allow for one central gymnasium or similar health facility that could be larger and better equipped. Also, consolidating public safety facilities into one structure could provide the same type of savings and by placing the administrative headquarters at the facility; the opportunity to reduce support staff is possible. The savings could be redistributed to other needs that did not have a funding source.

We see stories daily in the media about the homeless, needy families, elder abuse, and domestic violence. These stories refer to the law enforcement response and what was discovered during the investigation. The story typically ends with a reference to the support system necessary to assist victims of crime. These stories demonstrate the connection between the law enforcement intervention and the subsequent need for effective social service assistance. If a joint-use facility was in operation, social service agencies could staff a triage center, start a work-up on citizens needing assistance and connect them with the various types of support needed to help rebuild their lives. The police, having ready access to these resources, can connect victims and witnesses to help more effectively and without delay. While this idea may have been discussed before, the cost can be prohibitive in most cases. The free land provided by a base closure may be the only way to bring the idea to fruition.

By developing the former military property into a multi agency service center, a local government could streamline their ability to provide services. The acquisition of the land will avoid a huge expense and perhaps the developer could be required to build a police station/social services facility at their cost. The city could then consolidate the agencies in the new facility and this will create a potential source of revenue for the city.

Eventually, they would have the ability to vacate and sell the property that is currently unable to adequately serve the community. In some ways, this would replicate what the military is doing except that the local governments would sell off their property that is no longer needed and deferring the cost of building the modern facility to almost nothing.

Next Steps

As a proactive step, law enforcement agencies should monitor the B.R.A.C. list of bases slated for closure; they should evaluate their surrounding military bases even if they are not slated for closure to determine how it could be used if the base was to close. Although a base may not be currently listed, movement by the B.R.A.C. on other base closures could have a ripple affect that could move the base onto the list relatively quickly. Taking the initiative to evaluate how to transform the property to meet the city's most critical need would be an excellent proactive step. If the city determined that the base was useable, they would have some ideas in place before the opportunity became available. This would put them well ahead in the process and they would not have to face what many other cities' are often faced with, that is short notice and have little time to react and plan for the event.

Local law enforcement agencies will have to transition their planning for the future based on the projected growth of the community, the agencies ability to grow within its current infrastructure, the type of new growth they will need and how a former military base could be used to meet their future needs. The prospect of receiving land from the military can offer several exciting opportunities that usually are not possible. At the same time, it can present a course of action that is unfamiliar to most local governments and the concept of receiving land for free has little history that can be reviewed for a “best practices” approach to the acquisition.

If you have a military base within you jurisdiction, I would highly recommend checking to see if the B.R.A.C. has it on their closure list. Although it may not appear on the list when you check, it could be added to the list for the next round of B.R.A.C. closures. Make an investment in the future for your agency and local government; look at the base and the surrounding area and see what type of opportunities the base could provide for your law enforcement agency. This could be as simple as doing some online research, making a few telephone calls and doing a site visit. The research today may allow you to identify an opportunity and discuss the concept with the stakeholders within your agency and local government. This visionary effort could prevent you from having to evaluate the prospect with a short window of opportunity and no time to conduct long-term analysis. Planning once the opportunity emerges may be too late; the time to start is now.

